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SUBJECT: HAKIM AND S/I DISCUSS BASRAH, PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, IRAN

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a March 27 meeting with S/I Satterfield, ISCI leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim agreed that the current ISF offensive needs to be seen as directed against criminals rather than any particular party. Hakim was vague on the particulars of the election law, saying only that it needed to be studied, and likewise deflected questions about regions formation with the answer that such questions could be answered after provincial elections. He agreed that Iran needed to do more to support stability in Iraq and suggested Iran could benefit from bilateral talks with Iraq's other neighbors. After the meeting MP Redha Taki talked privately to S/I Satterfield and said that an UIA legislative coordination meeting held on March 26 turned into a discussion on how to respond to the "Sadr threat." End Summary.

¶2. (C) Asked about the current battles between ISF and armed elements in the south, Hakim emphasized the importance of enforcing the law and providing security, adding that people "from many groups" had complained about the disorder within Basra and that local security forces were unable to stand against the militias. Ambassador Satterfield thanked Hakim for his March 26 remarks supporting PM Maliki and the ISF offensive and said other Iraqi leaders, including the Kurds, needed to make the same public statements of support. Satterfield said that MNC-I Commander LTG Austin was traveling to Basra on March 27 to assess the situation and stressed the need for Iraqis to perceive the ISF campaign as a national effort against criminals and violent armed elements and not targeting any particular political party or movement. Above all, the confrontation must not take the form (or be perceived as) a Badr/ISCI fight with the Sadr movement. Hakim agreed, but added that Iraqis cannot build a new nation with people who break the law.

¶3. (C) Hakim said the impact of the violence in Basra on the October elections was unclear, adding that the elections needed to be free of corruption, bribery, and fraud. Satterfield asked about the structure of the elections, explaining that the U.S. believed an open-list system was the best way of strengthening a relationship between the electors and the elected. Hakim responded that ISCI was currently studying the issue and that all types of electoral systems, including closed or hybrid lists, had certain advantages and disadvantages. At present, Hakim said, there was no consensus within ISCI or the broader UIA on how to proceed. Satterfield stressed that little time remained before the October 1 deadline, and Hakim agreed that the matter needed to be studied "quickly." Pressed on likely developments after the expiration in April of the moratorium on region formation, Hakim said that the questions of federalism and regions formation needed to be addressed after elections were held.

¶4. (C) Satterfield turned to the issue of Iran, explaining

that the U.S. was prepared for another round of talks but due to timing issues they could not occur until the latter part of April. He stressed that the rockets hitting the IZ were Iranian-origin and fired by militia members trained in Iran. Hakim agreed that Iran needs to do more and suggested that talks between Iran and other neighboring countries, including Saudi Arabia and Jordan, would also be beneficial.

¶ 15. (C) After the meeting concluded, Ambassador Satterfield was approached by Redha Taki, MP and political spokesman for ISCI. Taki said that a 26 March UIA meeting to discuss legislative priorities quickly turned into a strategy session on what steps to "take against the Sadrist." Satterfield underscored that it was imperative that the current situation not become a Badr-Sadr confrontation.

¶ 16. (C) Comment: Taki's description of the UIA meeting suggests that, contrary to Hakim's assurances, ISCI leadership sees the current battle as against the Sadrist movement as a whole. Hakim was pale, seemed easily tired and coughed frequently through the meeting, appearing to be in worse health than during his March 17 meeting with U.S. Vice President Cheney. End Comment.

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